

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
CENTER FOR SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

John F. Kennedy School of Government
79 John F. Kennedy Street
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

April 9, 1987

J
nue
94707

Dear Dan:

Many thanks for your letter of March 11. Over the years I have been greatly influenced by your thinking. I'm glad to see that MacArthur is giving you the opportunity to elaborate and circulate these critically important ideas further.

I find it hard to comment on your work, since, as you'll see from glancing at the enclosed material, I find myself so much in agreement with it. However, there are a couple of points on which I think we may be in minor disagreement.

On page 15 (4th full paragraph) of your July Moscow speech, I believe you argue that if the Soviets had refrained from developing their own hard-target-kill capability, and had not put our ICBMs at risk, we would have had no incentive to launch them. The Soviets would know this, and therefore we would gain no leverage from the marginal threat posed by our own hard-target-kill arsenal. It seems to me that this argument presumes that the only reason we might launch our ICBMs is to save them from being eliminated by the Soviet ICBMs.

No —
to prompt —
for D-L.

I would argue that our strategy contemplates an even more pressing mission for our hard-target-kill capabilities. They are to be used to downgrade any Soviet capacity for retaliation following our first use of nuclear weapons abroad, regardless of whether the Soviet retaliation would be against our silos or populations. To elaborate, it seems to me that if the United States is make credible threats to use nuclear weapons abroad, it must do so from a position of confidence that the Soviet Union will not respond by attacking our homeland. This means that in any contemplated first ~~strike~~ use, we must be prepared to totally negate the Soviet Union's ability to attack any target in the United States. We can try to do so by eliminating all of their missiles with our own counterforce capabilities, or with defenses, or both. Since we agreed in 1972 to prohibit defenses, we pursued counterforce during the 1970s and 1980s. When it became clear that we would not be able to neutralize the Soviet capacity for retaliation, we began talking about combining offenses and defenses again.

My point is that strategic instability is less a substitute for the nuclear superiority of the 1950s and early 1960s, than it is a resulting consequence of our consistent damage limitation efforts, whose very purpose is destabilizing (ie-seeks to put the other side's retaliatory capacity at risk). In other words, my argument is that so long we retain the first use option, and so long as the United States remains vulnerable to any type of Soviet retaliation--regardless of whether the threat is to our missiles or people--we will pursue our own counterforce capabilities and we will have an incentive to use them during or immediately after a first use in the theater. The incentive comes from our desire to hedge against any attack on the United States, not just our desire to use our ICBMs before the Soviets can destroy them. It is an incentive that depends, in my view, on the mere presence and vulnerability of Soviet ICBMs, not their quality. As a result, in my view, so long as we are wedded to first use, we would not only not renounce our own counterforce arsenal, we would use it preemptively against whatever Soviet strategic assets we could find.

This leads to a second point of potential disagreement between us. You argue that our mutual objective in seeking arms control should be strategic stability. Agreed. But can stability be achieved without total abandonment of first use, extended deterrence, and the strategy of containment that drive them? Isn't the reason the SALT/ABM framework has been a failure the fact that it was almost from the beginning inconsistent with the damage limiting requisites of extended deterrence? It seems to me that those who argue for stability and arms control without questioning the basic strategy are bound to be portrayed as tearing threads from the fabric of deterrence and defense. This is what bothers me about Democrats like Albert Gore who on the one hand promotes elimination of MIRVs, but on the other, writes the following in Arms Control Today: "The President's proposal [for eliminating ballistic missiles] would probably suffice for [basic deterrence], but at least for this century it will probably not satisfy [extended deterrence], particularly if all INF forces are removed from Europe at the same time."

Gore is serving up a menu of some arms and some arms control. Unfortunately, he buys into the assumptions of extended deterrence strategy enough to ensure that real stability through arms control would undermine it; and he buys into arms control just enough to ensure that the strategy would undermine it.

If you believe in extended deterrence, it seems to me that you have to buy the damage limitation strategies (MIRVs, counterforce, SDI) that the Colin Grays of the world tell us are necessary to make at least seem credible. Only once you are prepared to renounce the broader role of nuclear weapons does the kind of stable deterrent envisaged by ABM/SALT become consistent with your strategy. Thus, it is not simply a matter of sitting down and agreeing to eliminate destabilizing weapons, as I think your

Moscow talk implies; the United States must first be prepared to abandon first use and extended deterrence--the things that drive us toward destabilizing weapons in the first place.

Since the rationale underlying containment and extended deterrence is avoiding Soviet conventional aggression, we are thus pushed inexorably toward conventional arms control, resolving regional disputes, and non-intervention as a parallel, if not prerequisite, to nuclear arms control and stability (Forsberg's point). While I realize that you can't do everything, I think your ideas would be even more convincing if you considered some of these links.

I'm enclosing a sheaf of paper with ideas that are very much influenced by your own. The book manuscript is a preliminary draft. I think chapters II, III, and IV would be of greatest interest to you (an earlier draft of chapter III, which is also enclosed, makes a few points more strongly), but would be very grateful for your comments on all chapters.

I have been invited back to Moscow in June as a guest of the Institute for USA and Canada Studies. If you have any suggestions about people who would be particularly useful to talk to or things that might be of special interest to them, please let me know. In the meantime, I look forward to hearing from you.

Thanks again for thinking of me, and for your courage and inspiration.

Sincerely,



Daniel Arbess.

Enclosures:

Regaining Security: February 1987
Moscow Diary, pp. 13-14
Reagan & Gorbachev: March 1986
Nuclear Debate & Peace Movement: December 1985
NYU Lecture: November 1985
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Until June 11, 1987

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After June 11, 1987

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No -
to prompt
for D-L.

(i.e. in
case of
escalation
?)

FO?

strike-

Hypo: "2-sided instability" (mutual incentive to strike first in a crisis) is "ruled" because nuclear superiority is not attainable to the point that would permit "1-sided instability": a positive prob. of a US FS as an escalation or response to SU "provocation," without a pos. prob. of SU FS.

My point is that strategic instability is less a substitute for the nuclear superiority of the 1950s and early 1960s, than it is a resulting consequence of our consistent damage limitation efforts, whose very purpose is destabilizing (ie-seeks to put the other side's retaliatory capacity at risk). In other words, my argument is that so long we retain the first use option, and so long as the United States remains vulnerable to any type of Soviet retaliation--regardless of whether the threat is to our missiles or people--we will pursue our own counterforce capabilities and we will have an incentive to use them during or immediately after a first use in the theater. The incentive comes from our desire to hedge against any attack on the United States, not just our desire to use our ICBMs before the Soviets can destroy them. It is an incentive that depends, in my view, on the mere presence and vulnerability of Soviet ICBMs, not their quality. As a result, in my view, so long as we are wedded to first use, we would not only not renounce our own counterforce arsenal, we would use it preemptively against whatever Soviet strategic assets we could find.

NOT IF
THEY ARE
"IMPERFECT"

NO

This leads to a second point of potential disagreement between us. You argue that our mutual objective in seeking arms control should be strategic stability. Agreed. But can stability be achieved without total abandonment of first use, extended deterrence, and the strategy of containment* that drive them? Isn't the reason the SALT/ABM framework has been a failure the fact that it was almost from the beginning inconsistent with the damage limiting requisites of extended deterrence? It seems to me that those who argue for stability and arms control without questioning the basic strategy are bound to be portrayed as tearing threads from the fabric of deterrence and defense. This is what bothers me about Democrats like Albert Gore who on the one hand promotes elimination of MIRVs, but on the other, writes the following in Arms Control Today: "The President's proposal [for eliminating ballistic missiles] would probably suffice for [basic deterrence], but at least for this century it will probably not satisfy [extended deterrence], particularly if all INF forces are removed from Europe at the same time."

yes

! (and NK)

Gore is serving up a menu of some arms and some arms control. Unfortunately, he buys into the assumptions of extended deterrence strategy enough to ensure that real stability through arms control would undermine it; and he buys into arms control just enough to ensure that the strategy would undermine it.

yes

If you believe in extended deterrence, it seems to me that you have to buy the damage limitation strategies (MIRVs, counterforce, SDI) that the Colin Grays of the world tell us are necessary to make at least seem credible. Only once you are prepared to renounce the broader role of nuclear weapons does the kind of stable deterrent envisaged by ABM/SALT become consistent with your strategy. Thus, it is not simply a matter of sitting down and agreeing to eliminate destabilizing weapons, as I think your

yes

2 *Did "Mr. X" inevitably tend to support "extended det"? (He said he was not thinking of military threat or response.)

... to get agreement, yes. But SO can propose de-MIRVing, and can withdraw extended det. initially.

Moscow talk implies; the United States must first be prepared to abandon first use and extended deterrence--the things that drive us toward destabilizing weapons in the first place.

Since the rationale underlying containment and extended deterrence is avoiding Soviet conventional aggression, we are thus pushed inexorably toward conventional arms control, resolving regional disputes, and non-intervention as a parallel, if not prerequisite, to nuclear arms control and stability (Forsberg's point). While I realize that you can't do everything, I think your ideas would be even more convincing if you considered some of these links.

2nd point!

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After June 11, 1987

March 25, 1990

I am asking to be a fiscally sponsored project of the Agape Foundation.

I will be undertaking the following activities:

1. Speaking and public education on the subject of the Persian Gulf War, its causes, risks and aftermath, to counter the militaristic pressures based on official interpretations.

Thus, for example, in the period since my first submission to Agape on March 11, I have spoken to this effect in lectures at California State College, Sacramento (March 14), Portland State College, Oregon (March 15), Black Oak Books (March 18), Urban School, San Francisco (March 19), talk shows on radio stations KGO (March 13), KGW (March 13), KLX (March 15), and I am scheduled to address Martin Luther King Junior High School tomorrow.

Next week I will be addressing a symposium--on "The Pentagon Papers: Twenty Years After"--at the JFK School, Harvard University, on the First Amendment Lessons of the Pentagon Papers (with relevance to the Persian Gulf war) crisis). The next day I will be the main speaker at a fundraiser for Social Workers for Social Responsibility in Boston.

2. Reading, research and writing on the recent crisis and its aftermath, both for the public education work above and for the more analytical research described below. All of these activities will require expenses for travel (next week's trip, for example, is covered by others only in small part), for books and publications, and for extensive phone, mail and FAX consultation with other movement activists and researchers.

3. Writing up for publication--either in the form of a book or a series of articles--my findings on the origins, risks and consequences of military crises, drawing on my study in particular of the Cuban Military Crisis and its bearing on the Persian Gulf War. (For a more detailed account of this comparison and the proposed study, see my memos, attached, of March 25, 1991 and October 9, 1990).

This effort will almost surely extend beyond the two months mentioned in my submission of March 11, probably to at least four months, perhaps six (and thus will ultimately require more money, from some source).

Sincerely yours,

